



State of Arizona  
Department of Education  
Research and Evaluation

# Reward, Priority, and Focus Schools

## Background

To receive flexibility from provisions of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), state education agencies (SEA) were required to develop and implement a state system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for all Title I schools in all local education agencies (LEAs). Those systems must use data for all students and disaggregate these data for all ESEA subgroups (i.e., race/ethnicity, special education students, English language learners, students eligible for free/reduced lunch, and Bottom 25 quartile as indicated by 2012 A-F Letter Grade accountability system) to measure 1) student achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics; 2) graduation rates; and 3) school performance and progress over time. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) was instructed that a SEA's system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support must create incentives and include differentiated interventions and support to improve student achievement, graduation rates and to close achievement gaps for all subgroups, including interventions specifically focused on improving the performance of English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The SEA's system must include, at a minimum:

**Subgroup:** student groups as identified in ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II)

- Set new ambitious but achievable annual measureable objectives (**AMOs**) in reading/language arts and mathematics **that provide meaningful goals and are used to guide support and improvement efforts** for the State and all LEAs, schools, and subgroups.
- Provide incentives and recognition for success on an annual basis by publicly recognizing and, if possible, rewarding Title I schools making the most progress or having the highest performance. These schools are identified as **"Reward Schools."**
- Effect dramatic, systemic change in the lowest-performing schools (i.e., **"Priority Schools"**) by publicly identifying them and ensuring that each LEA, with one or more of these schools, implements meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles in each of these schools for three consecutive years. The ADE must also develop criteria to gauge when a school makes significant progress in improving student achievement and is able to exit Priority status.
- Work to close achievement gaps by publicly identifying Title I schools with the greatest achievement gaps, or in which subgroups are furthest behind, as **"Focus Schools"** and ensuring that each LEA implements interventions, which may include tutoring and public school choice, in each of these schools based on reviews of the specific academic needs of the school and its students. The ADE must also develop criteria to gauge when a school makes significant progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps and is able to exit Focus status.
- Provide incentives and supports to **ensure continuous improvement in Title I schools, not designated as Priority or Focus Schools**, based on the ADE's new AMOs and other measures, are not making progress in improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps.
- Build ADE, LEA, and school capacity to improve student learning in all schools and, in particular, in low-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. The ADE must provide timely and comprehensive monitoring of, and technical assistance for, LEA implementation of interventions in Priority and Focus Schools. The ADE must also hold LEAs accountable for improving school and student performance, particularly for turning around their Priority Schools. The ADE and its LEAs must also ensure sufficient support for implementation of interventions in Priority Schools, Focus Schools, and the remaining Title I schools identified under the ADE's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system (including through leveraging funds the LEA was previously required to reserve under ESEA section 1116(b)(10), SIG funds, and other Federal funds, as permitted, along with State and local resources).



## Arizona's Methodology

### Reward Schools

Reward Schools are those Title I schools that Arizona commends for high academic performance or high levels of student growth. A *High Performance Reward School* is a Title I school with among the highest absolute performance over a number of years on the statewide assessments, is meeting AMOs and, at the high school level, has over 80% graduation rates. A *High Progress Reward School* is a Title I school among the 10% of Title I schools in the State making the most progress in improving the proficiency of all students over a number of years on the statewide assessments and, at the high school level, is also among the Title I schools in the State that have the most increase in graduation rates. A school may not be classified as a *High-Progress* or *High Performance Reward School* if there are significant achievement gaps across subgroups that are not closing in the school.

#### High Performance Reward Schools (Title I participating only)

To be identified as a High Performance Reward School, a school must meet **all** of the following criteria:

- Earn a letter grade of 'A' in Arizona's A-F Letter Grade accountability system in 2012 (all A-F Letter Grade models are eligible)
- Meet 2012 AMOs for the "all students" group and for all subgroups
- Have a student growth percentile (SGP) for their Bottom Quartile subgroup of greater than 50 in 2012
- Have more than 50% of Bottom Quartile subgroup passing AIMS in mathematics and reading (averaged) in 2012
- For high schools only, have a 4-year cohort graduation rate in 2011 of greater than 80%

#### High Progress Reward Schools

The ADE recognizes Title I schools that have high levels of student academic growth over a number of years. Specifically, to be identified as High Progress Reward School, a school must meet **all** of the following criteria:

- Earn an A-F Letter Grade of 'A' or 'B' on Arizona's A-F Letter Grade accountability system in 2012
- Have growth points (i.e., average of SGP for "All Students" and Bottom 25 quartile) from their A-F Letter Grade calculation of greater than 59 in 2012
- Show progress by having an SGP for their Bottom Quartile subgroup of greater than 50 in 2012
- Have more than 35% of their Bottom Quartile subgroup passing AIMS in mathematics and reading (averaged) in 2012
- For high schools, have an increase in the 4-year cohort graduation rate of greater than 10% between the cohort 2009 and cohort 2011.

### Focus Schools

A "Focus School" is a Title I school that is contributing to the achievement gap in Arizona. The total number of Focus Schools must equal at least 10% of the Title I schools in Arizona. To be identified as a Focus School, a school would need to **meet at least one** of the following categories.

#### Arizona's Achievement Gap

$$\frac{\# \text{ Bottom Q Passing AIMS} - \# \text{ Top2Q Passing AIMS}}{\# \text{ Bottom Q Tested} \quad \# \text{ Top2Q Tested}}$$

#### Low Achieving Subgroup Focus School

A school was designated as a Low Achieving Subgroup Focus School that met **all** of the following criteria:

- Less than 10% of 2012 Bottom Quartile students passing AIMS in 2012
- Lacking progress of Bottom Quartile students in percent proficient from 2011 to 2012 (i.e.,  $2011 \geq 2012$ )
- Schools meeting the criteria for Small School or Alternative School in the A-F Letter Grade Models as approved by the Arizona State Board of Education were **not** included in this definition



**Within-school Gap Focus School**

A school was designated as a Within-school Gap Focus School that met **all** of the following criteria:

- A within-school gap between the percent proficient of 2012 Bottom Quartile students and the percent proficient of 2012 top two quartiles students of greater than 75 percentage points
- Lacking progress of Bottom Quartile students in percent proficient from 2011 to 2012 (i.e.,  $2011 \geq 2012$ )
- Schools meeting the criteria for Small School or Alternative School in the A-F Letter Grade Models as approved by the Arizona State Board of Education were **not** included in this definition

**Low Graduation Rate Focus School**

A school was designated as a Low Graduation Rate Focus School that met the following criteria:

- Title I participating school with a 4-year cohort graduation rate of less than 60% for each of the 2009, 2010, and 2011 cohorts (three consecutive years)

**Priority Schools**

Priority Schools are those among the lowest 5% of Title I schools in the state on academic performance and demonstrate a lack of progress over a number of years, or at the high school level, have had a graduation rate of less than 60% for three consecutive years. Schools currently served under Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program will continue as Priority Schools for up to three total years of intervention, including any years spent participating in the SIG program. The specific criteria for identification as a Priority School are outlined below and apply only to Arizona's Title I participating schools with the exception of Low Graduation rate schools, as noted. The total number of Priority Schools must be at least 5% of the Title I schools in the State.

**SIG Schools**

A school was designated as a SIG Priority School that met the following criteria:

- A Tier I or Tier II School Improvement Grant school served and utilizing funds as of the 2011-2012 school year

**Low Graduation Rate Priority Schools**

A school was designated as a Low Graduation Rate Priority School that met the following criteria:

- A Title I eligible high school with a 4-year cohort graduation rate of less than 60% for each of the 2009, 2010, and 2011 cohorts (3 consecutive years)
- Schools meeting the criteria for Alternative School in the A-F Letter Grade Models as approved by the Arizona State Board of Education were **not** included in this definition

**Lowest Performing Priority Schools**

A school was designated as a Lowest Performing Priority School that met **at least one** of the following criteria:

- Received a letter grade of 'F' on Arizona's A-F Letter Grade System in 2012
- The Title I Alternative schools in the lowest 5% of total points from the A-F Alternative School Letter Grade Model
- Have among the lowest total points on the A-F Letter Grade system in 2012 among Title I schools
  - Arizona is required to identify a number of schools as Priority Schools equal to 5% of the total number of Title I part A schools in the state. After all schools have been identified that meet the SIG School and Low Graduation Rate Priority School definitions, and all 'F' schools and the 5% of Title I alternative schools, the remaining Title I part A schools are ranked according to their A-F Letter Grade total points. Starting from the lowest total points, the number of schools required to reach the 5% mark are included. This identifies the schools with the lowest A-F Letter Grade System total points that had not already been identified.



## Data and Definitions

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### Percent Proficient on State Assessments:

The proficiency rates are based on averages of the AIMS assessment in mathematics and in reading. Data are used from the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012 school years, as noted in each methodology. The proficiency rate in each subject is calculated as follows:

1. For [eligible students](#) in all grades, determine for each student whether or not the scale score is a [passing score](#), by subject
2. Calculate the percent of [eligible students](#) passing mathematics and passing reading, separately by subject, across all grades served

$$\text{Mathematics Percent Proficient} = \frac{\text{\# of Eligible Students Passing Mathematics in All Grades}}{\text{\# of Eligible Students Tested in Mathematics in All Grades}}$$

$$\text{Reading Percent Proficient} = \frac{\text{\# of Eligible Students Passing Reading in All Grades}}{\text{\# of Eligible Students Tested in Reading in All Grades}}$$

3. Average the mathematics percent proficient and the reading percent proficient

$$\text{Average Percent Proficient} = \frac{\text{Mathematics Percent Proficient} + \text{Reading Percent Proficient}}{2}$$

### Graduation Rates

A 4-year cohort graduation rate is required for all Federal calculations.

Each student's membership in a cohort class is established at the time of the student's first enrollment in a high school grade. It is assigned based on the typical four year expectation for graduation based on the high school grade in which the student is first enrolled. The student's identity with the cohort class remains the same, regardless of: student transfers, credits earned, time spent out of Arizona, time spent out of school, and the time necessary for the student to complete requirements for graduation. Students are maintained in the cohort for their last high school of record unless they have transferred to a school granting a high school diploma, have left to be home schooled, or are deceased.

When the graduation rate is calculated, year-end or exit codes are used to place students in the cohort into one of the three categories: graduate, non-graduate, and exited the cohort. Only records that have passed integrity are used in the calculation. To compute the graduation rate the following formula is used:

$$\text{Graduation Rate} = \frac{\text{\# of Graduates}}{\text{\# of Graduations} + \text{\# of Non-Graduates}}$$



*Student Inclusion Criteria:*

Arizona's evaluations include the following public school students who were enrolled for a full academic year: The ADE determines a full academic year by identifying students enrolled within the first ten days of instruction and consistently enrolled during the first day of administration of AIMS.

- Elementary students in grades 3-8
- High school students in their second year

The ADE determines via its statewide student tracking system whether a student has been enrolled for a full academic year. The Student Details system is validated and checked for integrity by the ADE on a regular schedule, which ensures that inaccuracies can be corrected in a timely manner.

*Subgroup Inclusion Criteria:*

Within the grades evaluated, the following student subgroups are included:

- Special education students
- English language learners
- All major racial and ethnic groups (White, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander)
- Students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch
- Students identified in the bottom quartile of students in their school, based on calculations from the A-F Letter Grade System (See [http://www.azed.gov/research-evaluation/files/2011/09/final\\_a-f-tech-manual.pdf](http://www.azed.gov/research-evaluation/files/2011/09/final_a-f-tech-manual.pdf) for more information).

*Proficiency on AIMS*

Arizona has defined four levels of student achievement (performance/achievement standards\*) in reading and math. Students scoring at the "Exceeds the Standard" or the "Meets the Standard" have passed AIMS and are considered to be proficient on AIMS.

- Exceeds the Standard: This level denotes demonstration of superior academic performance evidenced by achievement substantially beyond the expected goal of all students.
- Meets the Standard: This level denotes demonstration of solid academic performance on challenging subject matter reflected by the content standards. This includes knowledge of subject matter, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and content relevant analytical skills. Attainment of at least this level is the expectation for all Arizona students.
- Approaches the Standard: This level denotes understanding of the knowledge and application of the skills that are fundamental for proficiency in the standards.
- Falls Far Below the Standard: This level denotes sufficient evidence that the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to approach the standard have not been met. Students who perform at this level have serious gaps in knowledge in skills related to Arizona's Academic Standards.

\*For a more detailed definition of each performance level associated with the content areas of reading and mathematics, please refer to: <http://www.ade.az.gov/standards/aims/PerformanceStandards/Default.asp>.

